

- Calls on Social Security Commissioner to Investigate the "Culture of Denial" -

New Windsor, NY – Today, alongside disabled local residents whose claims for Social Security disability assistance were denied, U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) called for a federal investigation into instances of improper claim denials and a "culture of denial" designed to deter people from applying for disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA).

"Americans pay into Social Security over a lifetime of hard work on the promise that the system will provide them with the support they have earned when they reach retirement or become disabled," said Congressman Hall. "The possibility that individuals who paid into the system and need to apply for disability benefits were wrongly turned away as the result of a bureaucratic effort to reduce payments is outrageous and unacceptable."

Recent reports have indicated that a desire to reduce payments has created a culture within the SSA that discourages the approval of legitimate claims in order to save money. New York is one of the 14 states where claim examiners in a January 15th CBS Evening News report said there is institutional resistance to approving claims and pressure from managers on examiners to avoid approving above a certain number of claims.

"In order to ensure that Americans who have paid into the Social Security system have proper access to their deserved benefits in the event they become disabled, I urge you to direct the Office of the Inspector General to review these claims and investigate any instances of improper claim denials, claim quotas, or institutional attempts to disincentivize the approval of deserving claims," wrote Congressman Hall in a letter sent to Michael Astrue, Commissioner of Social Security.

Congressman Hall met today Robert Veneziali, a local resident he is trying to help appeal the denial of his Social Security disability claim.

Mr. Veneziali suffers from rapidly progressing debilitating multiple sclerosis that makes him unable to work. He has three children under age 12 and his wife is currently working three jobs to try and make ends meet. Mr. Veneziali's MS attacks leave him with vision problems, memory loss, balance loss, dementia, vertigo, and trouble swallowing food. His right arm has been numb for over six months. Mr. Veneziali filed for social security disability in August 2007 and was turned down after being examined by social security doctors and told that his case could not be reexamined for a year and a half.

"There is no word that can describe a parent's anxiety as they watch their son deteriorate. It is impossible for him to find work given the extent of his MS," said Elaine Veneziali, Mr. Veneziali's mother who contacted Congressman Hall's office for help for her son.

Congressman Hall is also trying to help Andre Allenberg of Monroe to appeal the denial of his Social Security claim. Mr. Allenberg's medical condition began deteriorating six years ago. He was diagnosed with sleep apnea, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and consistent, severe headaches. He also has glaucoma and non-existent peripheral vision. After these diagnoses, Mr. Allenberg continued to work, but then had a heart attack and subsequent anxiety attacks and blurred vision. He also suffers from arthritis. Due to his multiple medical

problems, his employer placed him on unpaid sick leave in 2005, after which he originally applied for social security disability. He was turned down for this claim in April of 2006. He was granted a rehearing that was held in September 2007 and he was denied again.

"I am a good person and for the last two years, I have spent a life in misery. I deserve better than that. I worked for 42 years and now, I can't work anymore due to medical conditions," said Mr. Allenberg.

Congressman Hall's office is currently working to expedite appeals hearings for both Allenberg and Veneziali.

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